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. WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS .
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Published occasionally by the
Washtenaw Historical Society

Vol. VIII, No. 1 Ann Arbor, Michigan November 1949

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THE PROPOSED WASHTENAW COUNTY BUILDING

By Ralph S. Gerganoff
Architect

Historical Background In 1822 the boundary lines of Washtenaw County were established by Territorial Legislative Council. Two years later John Allen and Elisha Rumsey built the first cabin on Allen Creek just south of the Huron River. Anson Brown and Edward Fuller built their cabins on the north side of the river. These early settlements grew rapidly and were known as the "Upper Village" and the "Lower Village."

Ann Arbor became the County Seat in 1824. Settlers flocking into the County made it apparent that a county courthouse was needed to keep the records of land sales, births, and deaths. Civic-minded John Allen donated the site upon which the present building stands. Controversy raged. Both "villages" wanted the courthouse, and even many "Hill Toppers" thought the site was too far removed from their business center.

Nevertheless, the contract was let in 1833 and the first courthouse was completed in 1834. It was of brick, 42'x60', and 2 stories high. It faced south and stood close to the Ann Street line. On each side was a one-story brick building which housed the register of deeds and county clerk. This courthouse lasted for 44 years, and then became "too small and unsuited to a wealthy and growing county."

During these years, 1834-1878, the county population increased from 14,000 to 40,000. Ann Arbor grew from 830 to 8,000.

As early as 1866 agitatión was started to build a new courthouse. A special election on an $85,000 bond issue was held in December of that year. It was defeated 2966 to 1431. Most of the opposition came from Ypsilanti and Dexter. Dexter residents believed the courthouse should be located there. Finally ten years later, in 1875, the Board of Supervisors at their December meeting adopted the following resolution:

> The courthouse now in use, by reason of age and use, has become dilapidated, inconvenient, uncomfortable, unhealthy, and unsafe for use. . .the records and documents of the several offices are exposed and liable to be destroyed by fire. . .it is the opinion of the Board that

public interest and safety and permanent preservation of important records and documents of the several county offices demand the early erection of a new courthouse..."

It was decided to place the question before the voters in the spring election. Fortunately, a fire broke out in the building just before the election. No damage resulted other than charring the walls, but it did awaken interest. When the votes were counted, 2428 were for a new courthouse and 2049 opposed. The cornerstone was laid on October 25, 1877, and the building was completed in 1878. It was 80'x127' and cost $83,000. Now, 71 years later, the second courthouse has become "too small and unsuited to a wealthy and growing county."

Conditions Today — In this period, 1878-1949, the population of the county has increased from 40,000 to an estimated 115,000. Ann Arbor has grown from 8,000 to nearly 40,000. At the present time approximately 90,000 are residing in the cities of Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, the fringe areas of each, and the corridor between. No other part of the county is so densely populated.

Even so, the courthouse square remains the focal point for the major city street and county highway pattern. Automobile traffic is extremely heavy and parking space is limited. Buildings around this small block are old, dingy, and with few exceptions present a dilapidated appearance. Front foot values of land have declined and the business center has moved to the 200 S. Main block. It will undoubtedly continue to move farther away and in a southeasterly direction. Changes in both city and county since 1878, and even since 1940, have been tremendous. Trends in population, business, and industry are upward. New patterns of distribution are evident. It is, therefore, proper that other sites, in addition to the present one, be considered when the county's third courthouse is built.

Recent Planning — During the past ten years the Board of Supervisors has considered more seriously securing plans for a new building. On March 12, 1945, R. S. Gerganoff, Architect, of Ypsilanti, was commissioned to prepare plans for a county building. Plans were completed on March 6, 1946, and the cost was established at approximately $2,300,000.

Funds were not available in 1946, and shortly after the voters were asked to express themselves at the following election if they wanted a new county building. The vote was favorable for a new building and the next task was to find a way to finance it. During this period the issue of building a joint County Building and City Hall was brought in. The other issue that is to be decided in the near future is whether the County Building is to be built on the same site or on a new location.

Investigating for New Building — As soon as the Architect was selected a series of visits were made by the Building Committee to various County Buildings in the State to determine the size, type, cost, and materials to be used.

The Architect also made additional visits to County Buildings in other states, which were serving counties of similar population.

The Architect made a study of the Washtenaw County population, past, present, and future growth. A study was also made of the requirements for each county department, each office, court room, future expansion, and other requirements.

When all these facts and particulars were assembled and presented to the entire body of Supervisors, the Architect was instructed to prepare plans for a 5-story building above sidewalk level and a full basement below the sidewalk level.

The Plans — The plans completed on March 6, 1946, for the present building site contain the following accomodations:

Basement (Below the sidewalk and street level)
- Heating plant
- Storage vaults for all departments
- Building maintenance shop
- General storage rooms
- Some unassigned areas

Ground Floor (above sidewalk level)
- School Commissioner
- Department of Agriculture
- Health Department
- Drain Commissioner
- Department of Weights and Measures

This floor has a wide corridor in the center connecting Main Street and Fourth Avenue entrances on sidewalk level. This floor is also accessible at the Ann Atreet entrance at sidewalk level and at the Huron Street entrance from the landing at the main entrance.

First Floor
- County Clerk
- County Treasurer
- Recorder of Deeds
- County Auditor

This floor has the main entrance of the building on Huron Street with broad steps and terrace approach on the outside.

Second Floor
- 2 Main Circuit Court Rooms
- 2 Judges' Chambers and Secretaries
- 2 sets of Jury Rooms
- 2 sets of Bailiff Rooms
- 2 Conference Rooms
- 2 Court Reporter Rooms
- 2 Prison Cell Rooms
- Clerk of the Court
- Friend of the Court
- Probation Officers
- Prosecutor's Offices
- Jury Assembly Room
- Attorney's Lounge Room
- Court Library

Third Floor
- Probate Court Room
- Probate Record Room
- Probate Judge's Office
- Probate Court work space
- Probation Officer's Room
- Juvenile Court Room
- County Agent
- 2 Jury Deliberation Rooms
- 2 Jury Rooms for men
- 2 Jury Rooms for women
- 1 Press Room
- 1 Conference Room

Fourth Floor
- Board of Supervisors' Assembly Room
- Board of Supervisors' Lounge
- 2 Conference Rooms for Supervisors
- Meeting Room for about 200
- Hearing Room for about 30
- Historic Room - space
- Poor Commission - space
- Women's Pension - space
- Welfare Bureau - space
- Red Cross Room - space

Fifth Floor and Roof
- Fan rooms
- Elevator machinery

Construction of Building — The structure is of fireproof materials. Exterior is of limestone. Windows and exterior doors are to be of bronze or aluminum. Interior floors are to be of terrazzo finish on lower floor and asphalt tile on other floors. Toilet accomodations are provided on all floors. There will be two elevators from basement to roof. Finish woodwork is to be of hard wood. Air conditioning is to be provided for the

Court Rooms amd Assembly Rooms at least. Heating shall be by steam and radiators, in addition to air conditioning. Furniture and furnishings are to be complete, using metal equipment for shelving and for majority of desks and chairs. Court rooms and large Assembly rooms are to have indirect lighting. Acoustical materials are to be used for Assembly rooms, Court Rooms, large rooms, and corridors. Marble is to be used for lower corridors and for toilet rooms wainscoting.

Paper delivered at regular October meeting of Society, October 28, 1949.

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Note:

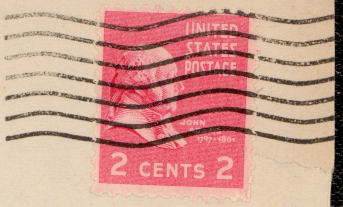
Vol. VI of Washtenaw Impressions consists of:

No. 1, April, 1948, 7 pp.
No. 2, May, 1948, 9 pp.
No. 3, June, 1948, 5 pp.

Vol. VII consists of:

No. 1, April, 1949, 8 pp., 1 map

ANN ARBOR, MICH. 1949



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